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Kambara

Southern Lau, Fiji : an Ethnography

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INTRODUCTION

SCOPE AND METHOD

This monograph is based on field work in ethnography in the Fiji islands, from August 1933 to April 1934, made possible by a Bishop Museum fellowship. The main problem has been to understand and describe the native culture of the southern islands of the Lau or Eastern Archipelago of Fiji not only as it is functioning today but also in its historical setting.

The Lau islands, located on the border of Melanesia and Polynesia (fig. 1, insert), have long been subjected to a diversity of cultural influences from adjacent culture areas. Even within the last century, exotic traits from neighboring islands, especially Tonga, have altered the native pattern (pp. 29, 215). Before the advent of western civilization Lau presented the complicated picture of a changing marginal culture which lacked integration. Moreover much of the apparent unity in the configuration in native culture was due to geographic proximity rather than to the inner necessity and slow growth which characterizes true integration. In the last hundred years the interplay of European and Tongan influences has further disintegrated the old native culture. These have affected not only the superficial aspects of life, such as technology, but its deeper phases, such as the social organization and religion.

The complicated history and lack of integration of the Lauan culture presented problems to the ethnologist attempting to study the old life. In order to recover as much of the native culture as possible, I limited the investigation to a group of six islands in southern Lau where western influence had been relatively weak because of their isolation in the Fiji group and lack of commercially valuable natural resources. No Europeans live or own land on these islands which have no communication with the outside world except an occasional government or trade cutter. First, seeking to gain an intimate knowledge of the daily life of a specific group, I spent five months making an intensive investigation of the village of Tokalau on Kambara. Tokalau with 125 inhabitants is the highest ranking village on Kambara, the largest island in southern Lau. Kambara had a population of 446 natives living in four villages. The island was small enough to allow personal contact with each individual and large enough to provide a choice of good informants. After I had gained an understanding of the culture on Kambara I spent the

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Analyst]

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remainder of the time surveying the culture on the islands of Fulanga, Ongea, Mothe, Namuka, and Wangava in order to check and gain prospective on the detailed picture and to secure a larger choice of informants. Altogether I studied 11 villages with a total population of over 1,500 natives.

The greatest difficulties in the work were encountered in attempting to recover the old religion after almost a century of mission influence and to analyze the intricacies of the social system after sixty years of British rule. Most of the old religion has been lost. The fragmentary account here presented (pp. 105-119) has been recorded as it was obtained from aged informants, especially Moto and Tchosaia of Kambara, Kalo of Fulanga, and Mosesi of Namuka. Much of it has been taken from the notes of Bernhard Tueting. It may be colored by the teachings of the missionaries.

Changes due to interisland warfare, to Tongan contacts, and to European influence have obscured or changed important aspects of the social organization, especially the phratry division, the local unity of clans, the ranks and functions of clan titles, and native social values in general. To gain a picture of the system as a whole it was necessary to make a detailed analysis of the social organization of the 11 villages studied. The analysis as here presented (pp. 31-103) is based on the genealogies of 37 clans recorded in the field, sketch maps of each village, property rights, clan gods and their incarnations, legends, ceremonies and the statements of reliable native informants. The data have been checked by an examination of archaeological sites such as hamlets, fortresses, and sacred places (pp. 216-223).

As will be seen in the following pages, a knowledge of the Lauan social system, based as it is on the native concept of mana expressed in social prestige, is vital to an understanding of the culture as a whole. Moreover, the evidence from which the system has been reconstructed is rapidly disappearing. Hence time was devoted to its study at the expense of the study of other phases of life—such as technology, social ceremonial, and games—which it is hoped may still be studied in the future. In such studies of material culture as were recorded an attempt was made to emphasize functional rather than technological aspects. The development of the individual, social sanctions and law, native medicine and changes due to the introduction of western civilization have been described in a special study of culture change and colonial administration in Lau (23)[1] and hence have not been included in this monograph.

This study is an attempt to record the most important aspects of the native culture of Lau as a whole before they disappear. It is necessarily incomplete. The aim has been to describe the culture of southern Lau as revealed by field research on the six islands visited in its geographic setting and, as far

[1] Numbers in parentheses refer to Literature Cited, p. 224.

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as possible, in its historic frame. I have attempted to record the facts and to document them so that the reader may judge and interpret them on their own merits and to avoid interpretations, except in the conclusion. Most of my interpretations have been treated elsewhere (21, 22, 23, 24).

In this monograph statistics refer to the years 1933-34. For obvious reasons fictitious names for native informants occasionally have been used.

LANGUAGE

The Fijian language belongs to the Malayo-Polynesian linguistic stock. It consists of a number of dialects with a simple Melanesian grammar and mixed Melanesian-Polynesian vocabulary. The dialect of Mbau, formerly the principal chiefdom of Fiji, has become the official language, used by British colonial officials and missionaries and taught in the native schools. No pidgin is spoken.

I acquired some knowledge of the Mbauan dialect during six weeks on Viti Levu while awaiting transportation to Lau. I employed two Lauan boys, aged 28 and 19, who had learned some English in school on Viti Levu and Lakemba, to help me with the modern Lauan dialect, which is a mixture of the old Lauan dialect known by a few aged natives, the Mbauan dialect, and the Tongan language. I acquired a conversational knowledge of modern Lauan, but throughout the field work interpreters aided me in understanding informants and checked my study of the meanings of words. They helped me especially in dealing with abstract phases of the culture.

In this monograph the spelling of native words follows Hazelwood's Fijian dictionary (10), except where the simplified system of spelling he employed to facilitate teaching the written language to natives misrepresents the sound of the language. *Th* has been substituted for Hazelwood's *c*; *mb* for *b*; *ng* for *g*; *ngg* for *q*; *nd* for *d*; *tch* for *j* (Lauan dialect). These sounds may be expressed phonetically as follows:

th = ð	ngg = ŋg	mb = ᵐb
ng = ŋ	nd = ⁿd	tch = tʃ

Place names follow British Admiralty charts except those of villages and other small specific localities in southern Lau, most of which have never been mapped. These have been recorded as pronounced in the Lauan dialect by the natives.

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177 trade articles. With the slump in the copra market after the
439 war, however, the import of these articles ceased as in many parts of the Pacific, and when I visited the group in 1934 the natives had regained much of their old economic independence. As the market price of copra has risen since then, trade articles have begun again to be imported.

178 Here is a native culture which, like many others in the South Seas, has gone through the throes of first contact with the western world and the economic depression and is well on its way toward making a new adjustment. What do we find on Kambara today? What has been the effect of the contact of two vastly different cultures, one simple, the other complex? On Kambara we meet individuals who represent the past, the present, and the future—from pious old Moto, whose father was a cannibal and warrior of the old order, to the alert and inquiring youths of the young generation who are building a new Fiji. Between age and youth lie a diversity of personalities, for there is a variation in temperament and intelligence akin to that found in a western community. Each individual reflects aspects of the great change affecting every phase of native life. By viewing these natives, their daily activities, their problems, satisfactions and fears, we gain a picture of life in this part of Fiji today. Their attitudes toward life mirror the diversity of influences, both from the old and from the new, which are moulding Fijian culture into a new form.

● 121 The aim of this study is to analyze the changes taking place in native life on Kambara, to try to understand the new culture which is emerging, and to apply this understanding as far as possible to the practical problems of colonial administration. How far is the change politically conditioned? What is the rôle of the colonial official in achieving a new, harmonious adjustment? Ethnologists have long been concerned with recording lengthy and technical descriptions of the lives of peoples who live in remote parts of the world, and in discussing theoretical implications. It is hoped that we have now reached

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the time when these studies can be of value to the administrator, the educator, and the medical practitioner. Using the results of field research, I have made the following study in the hope that it may be of practical value in helping to cope with some of the problems brought about by the expansion of western civilization.

Although the change taking place on Kambara in many ways is unique, it is one example of the adjustment of preliterate people, that is people without a written tradition, to western culture throughout the world. Although the results of a study of what is happening in one small area may not be applied uncritically to another, they should throw light on the general problem of how culture changes and can be changed. Moreover, the comparison of a number of detailed studies of specific groups of people should lead to a clearer understanding of the processes set in motion by the expansion of western civilization and of the problems of scientific administration.

The material on which this study is based was gathered during nine months of ethnological field work in the Fiji islands in 1933-34, and the data presented in this study apply to this date unless otherwise specified. While in Fiji I learned to know the natives of the eastern islands, their language and their culture by actually living among them in their villages and participating in their daily life. From my headquarters in Tokalau village on Kambara I studied the people of the island and made trips by native canoe, since no other transportation was available, to the neighboring islands of Wangava, Namuka-i-Lau, Mothe, Fulanga, and Ongea. These trips, which varied from 3 to 40 miles each on the open sea, were made in native outrigger canoes with crab claw sails of mat. Whether we skimmed in a stiff gale over the deep sea swells, lay becalmed under the scorching sun, or strained our eyes through the darkening night to hold our course to the faint low silhouette of an island, these canoe voyages were one of the highlights of my sojourn in Lau.

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fertile soil. Here a relatively large amount of the old life survives. Hence southern Lau provides a good field for the ethnographer interested in understanding a functioning culture of Fiji in its historic background.

Like other South Sea peoples, the Lauans lack written records. Only a few documents, written by early navigators, missionaries, and government officials[7] are available for this region. Besides these, in reconstructing the history I have relied chiefly on internal evidence such as genealogies,[8] folklore, ceremonies, social structure, property rights, and technology. Archaeological data[9] and selected statements of reliable native informants have been used as supplementary evidence.

The history of the Lau Islands may be divided into five periods: (1) the early period; (2) the period of cultural adaptation following the arrival of immigrants from the west (about ten generations ago); (3) the Tongan period (reaching its height in the middle of the nineteenth century); (4) the European period (beginning about 1835); (5) the period of readjustment.

PERIOD 1

The earliest known inhabitants of the Lau Islands are called kai vanua, "people of the land."[10] They had a simple social organization. They lived in scattered hamlets, called tokatoka, usually located near garden lands or in clearings in the bush.[11] Each hamlet consisted of a sib[12] led by a

[7] There is also an account of the culture on Lakemba Island twenty years ago by A. M. Hocart (*The Lau islands, Fiji*, Bulletin, Bishop Museum, No. 62, Honolulu, 1929).

[8] Genealogies of thirty-nine sibs, extending from five to ten generations, were recorded.

[9] To check the culture history, archaeological sites (including hamlet and village sites, hill fortresses, burial and fortified caves, gaming grounds, cemeteries, and temple sites) were examined on Kambara, Wangava, Namuka, Mothe, Fulanga, and Ongea. No excavating was done.

[10] Descendants of these early inhabitants are still called kai vanua. They have retained their sib units and sib dieties, and form one of the two main social divisions into which the Lauans are grouped. The descendants of the immigrants of Period 2 form the other division. This two-fold division has been obscured on many islands, especially on Lakemba and Mothe, due to Tongan and European influences, and on Namuka and Komo where the early population was destroyed and the islands were repopulated by colonists chiefly from Kambara and Wangava. It was worked out on Kambara by means of the sib genealogies, totems, dieties, holy places, hamlet sites, sketch maps of each village, legends, ceremonies, and the statements of old informants. Archaeological excavations should yield further information concerning Period 1.

[11] The natives know which hamlet sites belonged to the land people; for example, Vakawangga, Nawi, old Lomatchi, and Korokoroilulu on Kambara, and Nggilo, Tawali, and Toka on Fulanga.

[12] Each tokatoka was apparently composed of one sib. The tokatoka still retain their local unity though they are now consolidated into coast villages. They are called matanggali (sibs) and are divided into subsibs, called mbatchi ni lovo. The subsibs are composed of vuvale (households). Many sibs today are called by the place names of their old tokatoka.

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THE RELATIONS OF MEN, ANIMALS, AND PLANTS IN AN ISLAND COMMUNITY (FIJI)[1]

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121 THE problem of the ecological base of cultural phenomena is undergoing reconsideration by anthropologists from various points of view.[2] As part of this trend the present paper attempts to relate and interpret, from a total ecological viewpoint,[3] field findings of a geologist, a botanist, a naturalist and an anthropologist on an isolated community in Fiji.[4] Although the available data are limited, particularly as regards the botanical and zoological aspects of the problem, they seem to be sufficient to meet the needs of the present effort, which is designed to test the usefulness of a total ecological approach.

131 The community selected for study is located at the southern end of the 133 Lau or Eastern Archipelago, a north-south belt of 100 small islands, 30 of 101 which are inhabited. It consists of an isolated group of six inhabited islands and their uninhabited satellites.[5] Three inhabited islands, namely Fulanga, Ongea and Namuka, as well as all of the uninhabited ones, are composed of limestone. The other inhabited islands, namely Mothe, Komo and Kambara, are formed either wholly or in part of volcanic rocks.

133 No two islands are exactly alike in structure or mode of origin but in general the volcanic islands (e.g., Mothe) are eroded to rounded, reed-covered hills and gentle slopes or low, rocky promontories. They have miniature drainage systems which originate at high points near the central interior and form small streams with dentritic patterns. Their valleys are lined with relatively [134 deep, rich soil which supports a variety of vegetation including yams (*Dio-* 241] *scorea*) and other garden crops.[6]

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[1] I take this opportunity to thank Edwin H. Bryan, Jr., John Collier, Harry S. Ladd, Emma Reh, Ward Shepard, Albert C. Smith and Margaret Titcomb for help or comments on the manuscript.

[2] *See*, for example, Gayton, 1946; Hallowell, 1949.

[3] The term "total ecological viewpoint" is used to include the relations of organic species, including man, to one another in environmental context.

[4] The field projects on which this paper is based were unrelated and none of the researchers collected or analyzed their material systematically within a total ecological frame of reference. Edwin H. Bryan, Jr., naturalist, made a survey of the Lau group in 1924. Dr. Albert C. Smith, taxonomist, collected plants in 1934. Dr. Harry S. Ladd, geologist, studied the geology of Lau in 1934; and I investigated a culture-historical and culture contact problem in 1933–1934. Unless otherwise specified, conditions and institutions are described as of 1933–1934.

[5] The inhabited islands are Mothe, Komo, Namuka, Kambara, Fulanga and Ongea. The uninhabited islands are Karoni, Tavunasithi, Wangava, Marambo, Yangasa Levu, Navutu-i-loma, Navutu-i-ra, Yuvutha and Ongea Ndriki.

[6] Bryan (MSS.) states: "The dominant plant over much of the volcanic islands is a plume grass, *Eulalia japonica*, called *ngasau* by the natives. There are also several species of wiry ferns, including the "staghorn"; a low scrub, made up of about a half a dozen widespread species of

[pp 1-252 not processed]

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Our data suggest further that, once firmly established and embodied in the symbol system, the attitudes and the habits of a human community, a balanced, functional, eco-cultural structure tends to endure if the human community is not wiped out or severed from its natural setting. The data also suggest that such an eco-cultural community structure is the living core of relationships which the human group, either consciously or unconsciously, tries in multiple ways to perpetuate. An understanding of this core may be expected to throw light on the problem of so-called "cultural resistance," or a people's acceptance or rejection of certain extraneous patterns of belief, thought and behavior. For example, in Lau the community has tended to reject foreign patterns of feeling, thought and behavior which interfere with, or break down, its basic eco-cultural structure, regardless of the regulations or the penalties involved. It would seem that to the extent the Lauans have been unsuccessful in their resistance to harmful interference with their group life processes, the intentional or forced introduction of nonfunctional patterns or the prohibition of functional ones has tended to throw off balance the community's whole eco-cultural structure and has operated directly against its well-being. The implications that these findings have for the problem of prediction in social science are manifold.

Finally, the findings point up the practical significance of the eco-cultural approach and suggest that an understanding of a community's long-time, dynamic pattern of relationships is basic to the formulation of adequate norms or standards for the advancement of community welfare and for the development of community-oriented government administration.[22] Accordingly, the significant problem regarding community welfare and the conservation of resources does not emerge simply as the question of how human health and institutions may be improved, or of how topsoil may be saved, or watersheds, and forest land protected, or organic species preserved from extinction, important though each of these aspects may be. The significant problem of community welfare emerges as a matter of using and adapting local beliefs, attitudes, habits and institutions, supplemented where necessary by appropriate new ones, to the end that human groups, through natural eco-cultural processes, may foster the development and maintenance of a balanced, healthy *total* community—plants and animals, as well as human groups.

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[22] *See* Thompson, 1949.

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with woven mat-flooring might with few differences be found in parts of Malay to-day. The out-rigger canoe may seem fairly obvious, yet it was not used among western nations. Mariner, in his immortal book on Tonga, mentioned the veiling of women at a very ancient marriage ceremony which he witnessed there in the early days of the nineteenth century; and there are scores of little things like this that the Polynesian must have unconsciously retained despite his centuries of wandering and separation from his ancestral home. The language question is significant in itself; modes of thought and expression are very much the same, and there are more than a few root words to be found that are purely Malayan.

But enough of such theories, fascinating as they may be to the casual observer. Such things may safely be left in the hands of professional ethnologists. I have merely endeavoured to set down in this book some of the old legends and fairy stories of a people whom, with all their faults, I dearly love, and among whom I have lived and carried on my work for nearly ten years as Commissioner of their District. I take no credit for these tales, which are exactly as told to me by the natives themselves, and are selected from a big book of notes that I have made at odd times during my long residence amongst them. The apparently "biblical" language is